Fieldwork as Dreamwork

Mardomkavi: An Ethnopsychoanalysis of Words

Iraj Esmaeilpour Ghoochani / Don. Kunze

Short Abstract

What happens when words are approached not merely as signs but as dream objects? This question motivates an emerging ethnopsychoanalytic approach developed through ethnographic work in contemporary Iran. We call this approach *Mardomkavi*. It invites a reconsideration of fieldwork itself as dreamwork.

Abstract

Anthropology has often understood fieldwork as movement through, and work within, a geographical or social field. Yet contemporary ethnography increasingly encounters situations in which the boundaries of the field no longer coincide with place. Migration, war, digital infrastructures, artificial intelligence, architecture, multilingualism, and visual media all suggest that ethnographic realities emerge through configurations that cannot always be reduced to territory alone.

This panel begins with a simple question: **what if some of these configurations are already condensed within words, images, gestures, and other symbolic forms?**

Rather than treating symbolic forms as transparent media through which cultures are described, we invite participants to consider words, images, gestures, and objects as symbolic formations possessing their own histories, tensions, and trajectories. Like dreams, they often gather heterogeneous realities into a single form. Political conflicts, technologies, memories, religious imaginaries, everyday practices, desires, and historical sediments may converge within an ordinary expression without exhausting its symbolic life.

Dream, in this perspective, is less a nocturnal phenomenon than a symbolic space in which signs become more real than what they signify. Fieldwork, accordingly, may be approached not simply as the observation of cultures but as an encounter with symbolic condensations through which ethnographic realities become visible.

Rather than proposing a single theoretical framework, the panel creates a space for interdisciplinary dialogue and collaboration across anthropology, psychoanalysis, linguistic anthropology, semiotics, architecture, media studies, AI, philosophy, artistic research, and related disciplines. We welcome theoretical, ethnographic, artistic, and experimental contributions that explore how symbolic forms reorganize collective experience across diverse contexts. What if the ethnographic field is something we generate as much as something we enter?

The panel welcomes theoretical, ethnographic, artistic, and multimodal contributions.

Background on the research initiative:

Mardomkavi (Ethnopsychoanalysis) and of couse Ethnotopology

Figure 1. An ethnographic dream-object. An American pilot crashes in the Zagros Mountains and is captured by Bakhtiari tribesmen. Instead of demanding military intelligence, they ask him to read aloud the password to his mobile hotspot while everyone enters it into their phones. The image is impossible, yet immediately intelligible. It brings heterogeneous realities into a single symbolic scene.

Rather than asking what such an image represents, the panel asks what kinds of ethnographic questions it makes possible.